

Our Voice

the
spare change
magazine

January 1997 Vol. 4 No. 1

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Visual Voices

Selling
street art
see page 2

Photo Marc Hébert



Former Prime
Minister buys
magazine and
comments on 1997.

Our Voice

The spare change magazine

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OUR VOICE is published to provide an income opportunity for economically marginalized people in our society while communicating about their issues to the public.

For advertising rates and information, please contact **OUR VOICE** at 421-7966, John in Edmonton and 262-2693 in Calgary.

The VOICES

Looking to a better New Year

Looking to a New Year with this issue, we found some optimistic observations for the future. We also sadly mark the passing of one of our vendors, **George Caswell** in Calgary (see page 13).

Thanks to **Al and Candy Watson** for helping with the Calgary Vendors' Christmas party, which was catered by Calgary magazine distribution coordinator **Ed Greanya** and several vendors themselves.

Several **Our Voice** contributors are still seeking older used computers to write with. If you can contribute a working computer with a hard drive of any type, please contact the **Our Voice** offices. We'd be pleased to put that computer back to work with someone.

A belated thanks to **Jim Drawbell** for photographs of the Songs of the Street poetry night in the November 1 issue.

Thanks to this issue's contributors...

Barb Lauber, our Calgary assistant editor, brought us several pieces this month, including the Stuart McLean story on our back cover. **Michael Walters** helped with poetry again, as well as digging up the story *The Orphan*, by a new young writer.

Thanks to **Elvee Fenning**, in Calgary, for the Literacy story, to **John Zapantis** for his memoir on cockroaches "The Asian Tiger..." **Laurie McCullough's Kiss the Bride Part 7**, continues.

Linda Dumont contributed the story on native spirituality in prison as well as her Soupline Bob cartoon.

Thanks to **Susan Andrews** for the Crossword and to cartoonists **Ed Gould**, **Andrew Philpotts** and **Derek Oliver**.

This issue marks the last one as Edmonton assistant editor for **Tom Hind** who has been working with the magazine for the past several months. This issue Tom brought us a number of pieces including his musings on 1997. We thank Tom for all his writing and efforts and count on him as a regular contributor in issues to come.



On the cover...

Artist and **Our Voice** vendor **Sharron Cullen** (l) teamed up with **Doreen L'Esperance** (r), who handles **Our Voice** distribution in Edmonton, for a small art sale before Christmas. Doreen set herself a goal of finding a market for the crafts and artwork of vendors and other people in the community. She calls the project, *Visual Voices*, and says it will help sell art by people "who have no link to conventional markets." Sharron Cullen sold some of her pottery at the first display mounted by the project.

Photo by Marc Hébert.

JANUARY 1997 Vol. 4 No. 1

OUR VOICE welcomes your contribution. Letters sent to the editor are assumed to be for publication, unless otherwise indicated. **OUR VOICE** welcomes written submissions, particularly those on IBM or Mac compatible computer disk, cartoons, photographs or artwork. **OUR VOICE** cannot accept responsibility for any submission. No part of

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Our Voice

The spare change magazine

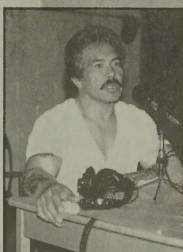
JANUARY 1997

The people who bring you **OUR VOICE**

This publication exists because of the efforts of the people who sell it to you on the street, the vendors. For our vendors **OUR VOICE** is a job that helps them to be independent and self-employed. Each issue we highlight one of our vendors in Vendor Profile to let you know a little bit about the people who bring you **OUR VOICE**. ♦

1997 What will it hold for you?

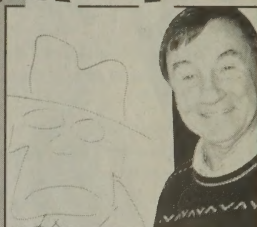
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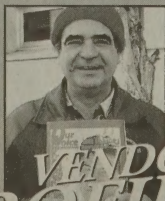


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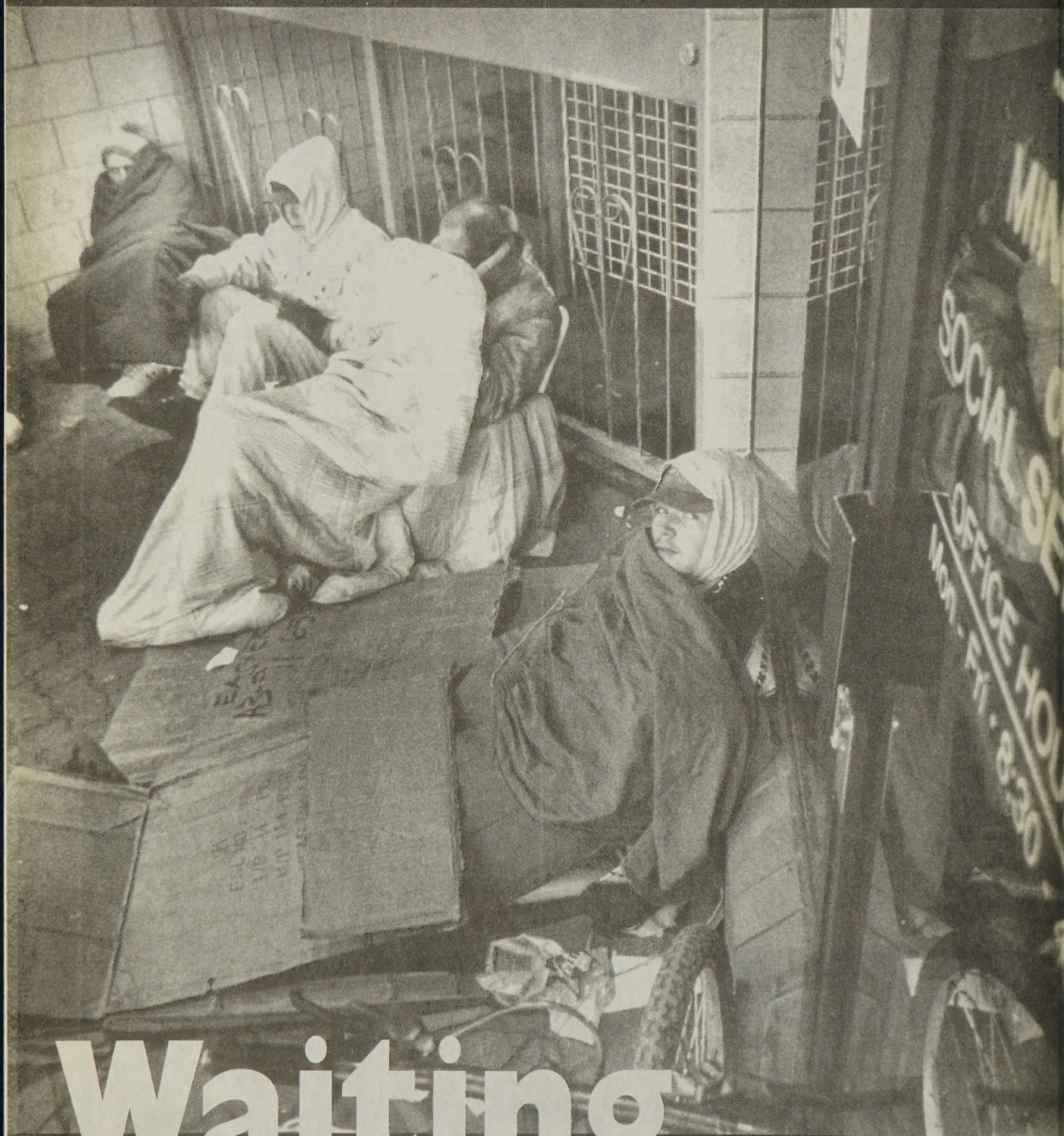
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VENDOR PROFILE

BACK ▶
STUART
MCLEAN
Writing
Contest





Waiting

for next year

An award-winning photo of young people desperately waiting, by Gordon Bazzano of the Kelowna Capital News.

1997

What will it hold for you?

1997 CRABAPPLE OR HONEY?

BY TOM HIND

What do the faces hold? Some of the faces I see on the streets are of tortured souls; faces of people crippled by life or addictions or bad relationships or poverty or fear.

It's easy to tell who's been traumatised by recent life-events, who's had a good run and prospered. The story is in the pigment of skin, the gleam of eye, the vitality of speech, the newness or patched oldness of clothes, the gait of foot.

As I see it, there is a lot of madness on the streets, some of it man-made. I see it etched in mottled faces, people with wild eyes screaming messages of some personal despair. I see these faces on freezing icy sidewalks; babbling faces chortling and chanting about money, no new sneakers or gloves, or some other personal misery.

And the crowd grows larger. So do the waiting lines outside welfare offices and food banks and health clinics. 1996 has not been very generous to many people in and around the inner-city -- only to local hotel owners, land and slum lords.

Que sera, sera, eh?

No! Damn it all, it isn't "whatever will be, will be". That's a cop-out phrase. As though there was some magical hope to be found in poverty, in the basement suite people live in with cockroaches, with their constant lack of money? Look at the faces. Look deeply into the eyes. The soul will tell.

1996 turned out to be as sour as a crabapple for many. No wonder the crimped eyes are gathering weathered lines that dig deep gullies and trenches in blanched, sunless skin. Take the guy down the street; once robust and healthy, he is now flaking away with diabetes rotting him from the inside out. He's cheerful, for the most part. He has a vision of life that says good times go with bad and that's what makes the good times more memorable. His soul is in fairly good repair. But the guy across the road from him, also diabetic, is rotting from the outside in. He hasn't the wherewithal to treat his body fairly with good food, the rest, and the proper daily dose of medicine. His soul's in disrepair, not attended to properly.

continued...



Former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Joe Clark shared a bit of his hopes for 1997 with *Our Voice*: "What I look forward to is our greater sense of being one community. I think in the last decade we've become a much more divided society." Mr. Clark sometimes buys his copy of *Our Voice* from vendor Peter Swinton.

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There are people in your community who are willing to help others learn to learn. So if you know any adults who need to improve their reading, writing or math skills, here's how to find help.

Alberta Literacy Help Line

1-800-767-3231

CRABAPPLE OR HONEY?

He's spent a chunk of his life in institutions and is stuck with the belief that life isn't fair (sometimes true). He's full of dread that tomorrow he will be dead because he forgot his insulin or to eat properly. His alcoholism is getting in the way as he drinks to forget his misery. His face is full of sheer terror. He's scared to bring in 1997. He thinks it will only get worse. No honey. No sweetness. Only more of the same damn thing in the world of "one damn thing after another".

What makes some souls different from the gloomy-doomy treadmill walkers? Hope, I tell you, is the answer. Realistic hope with which people take into account their situations and how they can live the best life they can.

Realistic hope is very different from its opposite, unrealistic hope. "Tomorrow I'll win the lottery and tell everyone to eff off: social workers, bad bosses, people I don't like." Some people become experts at deluding themselves. It breeds further illusions about life.

Realistic hope for people living in frugal situations deals with the possible. How can I live with my poverty, my sickness? I will do what I can to improve my situation, hook up with people who can still laugh at the follies and tricks life plays on them, without losing it to anger, to alcohol or drugs or to fear. Real hope is as sweet as honey. It is a guide, a comforter, a regulator.

There is sweetness in my life, even if it is in small measures, a thimbleful here, a decanter there. Not every day is great. But the odd bad day does not let me lose sight of my belief in the goodness of man. In fact, the odd bad day makes me appreciate the good ones.

I am determined to make 1997 the best year possible. I will draw what honey I can out of it. The nectar is there. I will work at my scribbling, associate with kind

souls, rich or poor. I will not go out of my way to harm others. Intentional harm to others is the way of the weak spirit, the "lost" soul. It is not a good way to motor in life. I do not want to become one of the crowd of tortured faces and mad gleaming eyes I see so often about me. To lose hope is to lose life. And I like living.

What will it be, a crabapple year or a honey one? Whatever your answer, you make it what it is.

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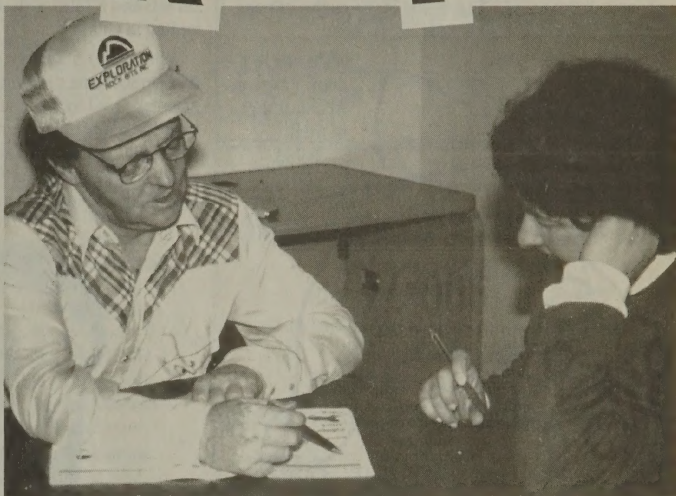
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LITERACY

READING: A LIFE-LONG JOURNEY

**Red works on reading
with a volunteer.**

BY ELVEE FENNING



Red's goal, at the age of 50, is to get a better education. He says with pride that, "In the last year I have gone from a Grade 3 level of reading to a Grade 6 level, and I'm able to help other learners. I can now go to night school at Alberta Vocational College."

Red was the first "learner" in the literacy program run by the Calgary Urban Project Society.

For many people today literacy means hope of a life of fulfillment, while illiteracy may lead to a life of struggling just to meet basic daily needs.

"A new study called the International Adult Literacy Survey, just released by Statistics Canada, proves there is a direct relationship between the state of a country's economy and the levels of literacy within that country. One in five Albertans have difficulty with daily activities in reading, writing and math," says Dolores Coutts, Project Manager of the Alberta Association of Adult Literacy.

The study goes on to say:

- between 56% and 64% of unemployed Canadians are marginally illiterate
- higher levels of literacy decrease unemployment rates
- the majority of people needing help have skill levels ranging from none to about a grade 6 level

Joan McCreary, a retired school teacher, is attempting to make a difference in the lives of some of the people who frequent the Calgary Urban Project Society. Joan

began volunteering at C.U.P.S. in January, 1996 as a reception and referral worker. This she felt would be a good way to gain the trust of prospective learners. Her goal was to create a literacy program at C.U.P.S.

"This is something I wanted to try to do . . . to give back to the community some of the help I received during my years of teaching."

Teaching is done on a one-to-one basis. Joan has recruited several volunteers to help. One student loves music so the volunteers gain her interest by using music books. Another student dreams of becoming an architect. A volunteer was able to find drafting books to start him on his journey in reading.

She explained, "People with low literacy skills have difficulty expressing their dreams. When we can get them to express their dreams, then we can interest them in learning to read."

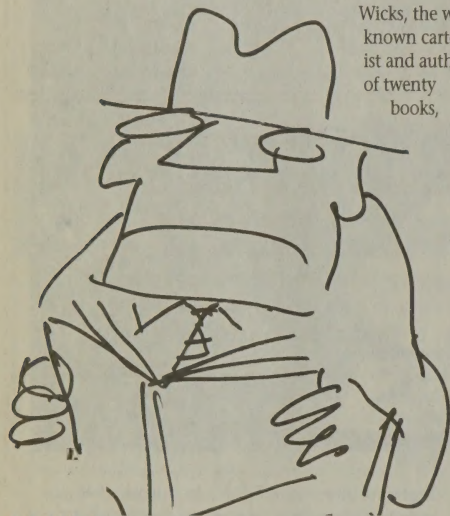
People who lack literacy skills learn to hide their lack of reading ability. One volunteer said, "They are often shy and withdrawn. Some are in need of learning anger management skills."

Joan teaches two mornings a weeks and spends two mornings "wheedling" books, finances, art supplies or any other material that will help the learners." A computer was recently donated to the program. Joan adds, "There is always a need for more volunteers so that the program can accommodate more learners." People interested in helping the C.U.P.S. literacy program can leave a message for Joan at 220-8780. ♦

Ben Wicks' "Born to Read" promoting literacy

STORY AND PHOTOS BARB LAUBER

Picture a disappointed elephant standing at the checkout desk in a library. The librarian is saying, "Sorry, we have no more Babar books." That is one of the many cartoons in Ben Wicks' new book, *Born to Read and Write*.

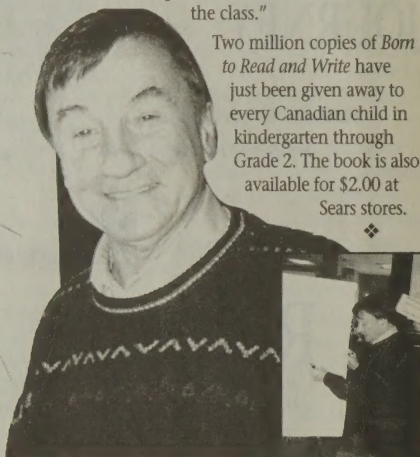


Wicks, the well-known cartoonist and author of twenty books,

recently visited Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg to promote *Born to Read and Write*. The short book is aimed at parents and is filled with suggestions to encourage reading and writing in children.

Wicks, who is a patron of Laubach Literacy Canada, believes that family literacy is the best basis for adult literacy. He urges parents to read to their kids from the day they come home from the hospital. He warns that, "children who arrive at school without having been read to, or who have no favorite books or stories, will find that they are at a distinct disadvantage. They will ask fewer questions and have shorter attention spans than their new friends in the class."

Two million copies of *Born to Read and Write* have just been given away to every Canadian child in kindergarten through Grade 2. The book is also available for \$2.00 at Sears stores.



WIN A BEN WICKS' ORIGINAL

Ben Wicks drew this original for OurVoice. We'll send it to the first reader who calls the Talk Back line with a comment on literacy.

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Native spirituality powerful force in prison

BY LINDA DUMONT

In the past I would have been chief of the Native Brotherhood," says Blair Pelletier. "Now I am more of an administrator." Pelletier is the aboriginal advisory facilitator of the Aboriginal Multi Media Society of Alberta at the Edmonton Max, where he is serving a life sentence.

The Max is western Canada's most heavily-guarded prison. It is surrounded by a heavy chain link fence topped by curled barbed wire. A truck constantly circles the yard, which is overlooked by guardtowers.

Passing through three metal gates you reach the heart of the prison. There is a brightly-painted room with recessed ceiling lights. Two ornate head dresses with red, white, and blue feathers adorn one wall. On another is a Canadian flag with the picture of an Indian in head-dress and buckskins. In the center of the room is an aboriginal drum set.

Blair Pelletier and two other lifers, Peter Wabach and Abe Gabriele, speak about the brotherhood, as they still call it, and what it means to them.

"There have been some negative things in the past, so we really toned it down. The Native brotherhood got shut down. It was at a standstill. I was working in the kitchen at the time. We had a meeting and I agreed to let it go again ten months

ago. We stay away from politics. The emphasis is cultural and spiritual."

Wabach is quiet and laid back. Dressed in a t-shirt, jeans and head-band, he adds, "Before it was always Red Power cliques. Now it's all integrated."

Gabrie explains that the population of the prison is around one hundred and thirty men. About sixty percent of them are native, but only about thirty use the aboriginal program. They

have to apply to the work board. If they are accepted they come in during work hours and are locked in.

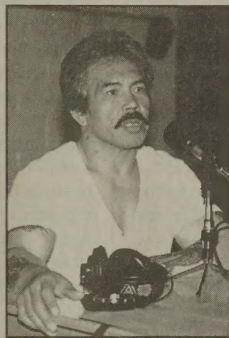
The activities are spiritual and cultural. Two elders come in five days a week on alternating weeks.

Sundays, there is pow-wow dancing. Sweats and pipe ceremonies are held on Friday after-

noons, with drumming and dancing followed by a meal of bannock and soup on Thursday night.

The men have a sewing machine to sew tee-pees. A roll of canvas costing \$400 makes two tee-pees, which are sold to make money for the Brotherhood.

"I got here in June. I learned how to set up the sweat lodge, and prepare for pipe ceremonies. It's something I never learned before. I had an alcohol and drug problem. Now I've made a commitment to live a more cultural life. We try to get people who are not using drugs involved. Out on the street I wasn't around anything cultural," says Abe Gabriele. ❖



Blair Pelletier at the Max

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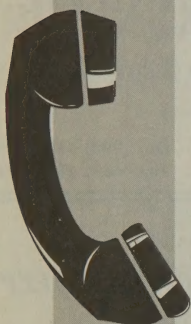
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WATCH TV OR MAKE A LIFE

I expect criticism for this letter. Readers will accuse me of "poor bashing". It just ain't popular to say that some working poor and/or people on welfare only make their lives worse.

Many studies have shown that the lower your income, the more likely it is you suffer from health problems. In twelve years and thousands of grocery trips driving cab, I saw one big reason why. I always noticed how low income people bought more junk food that robs the body of health, the brain of clear thought, and is damn expensive. I know that from personal experience. MY ANSWER-wake up to how much damage it does. I also find it much cheaper not eating meat, eggs or dairy foods.

The lower your income the more likely your spare time is spent watching TV. Studies have shown that heavy TV watchers eat more junk food. Duuuuhhhh really!!! What are half the commercials pushing? Cut back or get rid of it. I haven't had a set for thirteen years. What else to do? Do worthwhile volunteer work. It looks good on an application/resume. Get into shape, a second-hand bicycle is cheap. Try starting a conversation with

someone you're sure is better off and more "together" than you. Don't be surprised if overcoming intimidation and TALKING with people you thought you couldn't, leads into trying to DO things you thought you couldn't.

Now I do realize there are many who try everything to improve their lot and due to various mental, physical or social drawbacks, hit one brick wall after another. I'm not writing this for them. To some degree or another, they CAN'T help themselves. I'm aiming at those who WON'T. You know the kind, they're usually "smart", with no health problems. They just "always look for the easy way" or whine that they "never got to grade 12".

Ed Frey

IMMIGRANTS FACE HARDSHIP

I am an East Indian immigrant from Guyana, South America. I live on the North side and I buy every issue from your badged vendor stationed at University LRT station. He is a friendly and sociable guy.

In my country I was an elementary school teacher all my adult life and worked mostly in native schools in remote areas.

Here in Canada, because of the job situation, I am a full time janitor in the West

end. In my two years as a permanent resident of Canada I can't understand why such an industrial, affluent and highly technological advanced country has so much poverty, especially among the natives and recently the refugees and new immigrants.

As a single parent of three teen-age children it is very hard for me to survive on the money I make from work. But I'm struggling rather than be a burden on the ever dwindling welfare system.

In my country the Catholic Church assists the poor and publishes a bi-monthly paper just like yours for the natives and downtrodden. I admire your courage and determination against all odds to publish a beautiful magazine for the poor in this country.

**Roy
Edmonton**

ABOUT CASH CORNER

I have some concerns about the recently published article, CASH CORNER, by Ellis Hiebert. The article painted quite a negative impression of Bissell Centre's Casual Labour Centre in comparison to Calgary's Cash Corner. I have no problem with comparisons or being accountable to service users, funders and the general public. The article, however, does a poor job of representing

what Bissell Centre's service is all about.

To set the record straight, Bissell Centre's Casual Labour Program made 5898 job placements in 1995. In 1994 we made 114 long-term work placements. We have quite a bit of success in matching workers with employers. It shows that, in addition to casual labour, some employers utilize the service as a job screening mechanism to hire for longer-term jobs.

Workers are screened for their skills and employability. Every effort is made to ensure that we appropriately match workers to jobs. We depend on the satisfaction of employers. Ongoing support is provided to our workers, including employment-related courses.

The article's description of waiting to get a bingo number is inaccurate. It paints a picture of a service that is demeaning and unprofessional. We have worked hard over the years to improve the standard and quality of our service. The staff care greatly for those they serve.

The lack of effort in editing this article has failed the magazine's main supporter and the program where the magazine received its genesis.

**Anne Daly
Employment
Coordinator,
Bissell Centre Casual
Labour Program.**

Imagining the year 2005

The year 2005 looked like a bad one for her.

He'd just gone, left, disappeared. After eight years and two kids, he was out of there. It started after the business he worked at had to shut down. He couldn't find another job right away. He got depressed, and the money wasn't making it, they were going deeper into debt. They fought, not just about money, but about everything, even in front of the kids.

Now he was gone. How would she and the kids survive this year?

She was desperate, crying after the kids went to bed. What could she do? She asked around and she found help. Just eight blocks away there was a family centre. The women there were very understanding, "That's really tough," they said. "We can help," they said, and they did. They helped her get welfare, they helped negotiate with the bank, they made sure she didn't have to move.... God she couldn't have faced moving.

They did a lot more too. They were fun, and the drop-in for the kids was a great break. After a couple of months she was on a train-

ing program for computer work, and the kids were in the daycare at the family centre. "You're doing really well," they told her, "you'll get a job for sure."

Things were going better, for the first time in months she could relax, just sit on the couch, hug her kids and relax.

Then he came back.

"Sure," she thought, "just when things are getting better, and now you want me to feed you, too." But the kids were glad to see him. He did seem really sorry.

At the centre they said "Bring him down for family counselling." They could go see Barb there.

He didn't want to, but she didn't give him much choice. And, incredibly, it worked. They had a plan, he was getting some training now too, and he moved back in. Welfare didn't cut them off; in fact it would go up while they were both looking for a job.

2005, the disaster year, was looking pretty good to her now.

Could we do it? Could we make 2005 happier?

Total fiction. Pipe dreams. But could the world be like that? Could we have a supportive social service network that really did help people pull their families together and stay on their feet? Imagining the future, imagining how it could be better, is the point of a special project of Edmonton's Muttart Foundation. *Edmonton 2005: A place for all* has worked with nearly 2,000 people to create a vision of how "human services" could help people live happier lives.

The picture they've come up with is a pretty one: "People feel that the community belongs to them, that they are part of it and supported by it." There are seven key observations in the project's first stage report, and at least four of them talk about people being connected and caring for each other. The other observations are about money, about accessibility and about the flexibility of services. When one reads the report, however, the theme of people connecting humanly with other people stands out dramatically.

The report identifies a problem too, being connected takes time: "Earning a living, caring for homes and families,

dealing with aging and ill relatives, and just coping, keep people from getting involved."

Stressed, everyone is stressed trying to get the groceries, feed the kids, make the appointment, work the overtime, drive to lessons. Or stressed worrying about the rent, riding the bus to the food bank, feeding the kids, making the appointment with the social worker, calling the job ads.

Squeezed by time and money, how communities caring, people services and so our world is p squeeze now. need parents t good jobs, job vide enough i they don't hav at two jobs. TI have the time to spend with the kids. Good jobs take money.

Time and

resources. When we picture a happier year 2005 the questions that we finally have to consider are about how our society is using its resources, where the money is going. How do we as a society direct our resources, our time and money so that it can help to create that happy year?

Congratulations to the Muttart

Foundation for the idealistic vision it is creating. In these hard times, it is courageous to go out

ask what our communities should be like. good to hope for

Foundation on now to make that ue. Far harder than a pretty world, is ig the steps to take it happen. d by time and by oney, what is the istic road to happier communities for people to live in?

Keith Wiley

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OPINION

Mars has attacked, I am sure of it.

I just read that hizonorable (sic) Stockwell Day, Alberta's Minister of Social Services, says food bank users are simply out for some free grub and the Edmonton Social Planning Council has just cooked the books and invented thousands of empty tummies in its study of Edmonton.

What I'm wondering is: what planet is this guy from? Can we send him back?

I am sure that it must be a thankless job being the minister in charge of "social restructuring" 'er... "social services" but hey, at least Stockwell could get his facts straight.

First of all, the average food hamper (a misnomer, as it implies there is a lot of food) has a few boxes of macaroni and cheese, a can of tuna, a couple of teabags, some peanut butter and, if you are lucky, some outdated bread. I am not knocking the food banks' efforts, just wondering out loud when you could find this stuff in Stock-welled Dazed's (sic) cupboard.

Factor in the wait at the food bank, multiply this by dragging a long a few cranky kids, and add in the humiliation of needing outside help to meet your basic needs.

The result of this equation (when calculated by earthlings, at least) is ... no one would go through this to avoid going shopping and spending money at a grocery store. Welfare is not the attractive alternative lifestyle that some politicians would have you think.

The same mathematical principle would apply when figuring out how many people are too chintzy to take their mother out to a restaurant on her birthday, instead of sampling the fine cusine at a soup kitchen.

The government has graciously offered support to those people who are "truly hungry" --if they are willing to come forward and be named. However, the offer rapidly loses its appeal after recalling that this is the same punitive government that refused to blink after firing a couple of over-burdened social workers who dared to speak out.

Minister "Dazed" has also said he supports the work of the food banks. Well, of course he does... they are doing his job for him.

We do need a reminder that there are hungry people out there and maybe even a bigger reminder that human beings with hearts --not Martians make the best leaders.

Fiona McNair

IN MEMORIAM

GEORGE CASWELL:

A FRIEND WHO NEVER CAME TOO CLOSE

On December 8, 1996, George Ray Caswell, aged 71, died in a Smitty's Restaurant. We at **Our Voice** do not want George's passing to go unnoticed. George sold **Spare Change** and **Our Voice** newspapers since April 27, 1994. He was Vendor #34, the thirty-fourth person to sign up in Calgary, and the only one to stay with the paper so long.

George was an independent man. He worked right up to the day of his death, supporting himself. He made about \$20 a day selling **Our Voice**, enough to survive on.

"This was a homeless person, but he was courteous and friendly," said Andrew Stefaniuk, who had known George for three years. "He made me chuckle, he made me laugh." Stefaniuk, a Canada Post employee, was a customer of George's and a friend. He bought him meals now and then. He bought him a parka. He offered to let him stay at his house when it was cold. He urged George to call if he ever needed help. George never took Andrew up on his offer, but he had Andrew's card on him when he died. Andrew tried to get him his pension, but George refused to cooperate. He didn't trust the pension system. "Why would they want to give me money?" he asked.

"I don't know where he disappeared to when it was

minus 40. That's what bothered me," said Andrew. For a while George slept in an old truck he rented for \$10 a night. When it got really cold, the owner kicked him out, afraid he would die in the truck. After that we think he spent nights in all-night coffee places, staying as long as the staff would let him.

"I will remember George's friendly smile when he came

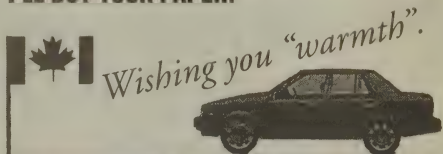


to pick up his papers. A mile accompanied by a wry remark on some topic of the day," said Ed Greanya, Calgary **Our Voice** distribution coordinator. "He's been a vendor since we opened in Calgary. Never an unkind word. Never a complaint. George was a friend who never comes too close but always brought cheer to me."

George probably had pneumonia when he died. He refused to go to the hospital or see a doctor. He'd been talking about dying for several months. His bent-over spine kept him in constant pain. He just seemed to lose his will to live.

Thirteen people attended George's funeral at Leyden's Funeral Home in Calgary. ♦

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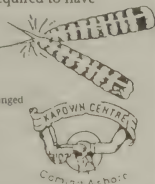
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WORDS on the street

Skidrow to university

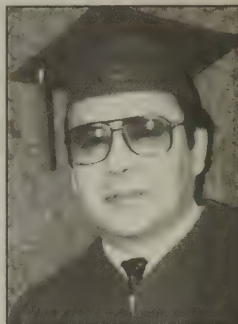
A friend once told me: "Skidrow is like World War Three, if you can endure it, you can survive anything." He went on to say, "there is hope for everyone."

In 1968, I came to Edmonton to challenge Grade 12 and move on up the ladder. With the school year nearly over, I took one step backward, to join the party scene. This route, eventually landed me in the school of hard knocks, where books are not an issue. There are no rule books on skidrow, just the instinct to survive. By 1972, I had become a street-wise wino, who never thought of tomorrow. With no set goals in mind I soon fell into the unwanted cracks of society.

Twenty-three years of street life with nothing to show for my existence. By now skidrow took many of my friends, and I did not want to become the next victim. With determination and the will to live, I mustered enough courage to change my life around. My love for the wine drained with my last drink in the fall of 1991.

Since that turning point, five good years have passed. I may never get rich, but I feel like a million dollars. Crossing over to the other side of the track is the best decision I have ever made. Indulging in wine is the thing of the past, but I will never forget where it led me.

In 1992 I took a forward step that took a quarter of a century to make: I applied at Concordia College. Because of my brushes with the law I



was put on hold until the fall of 1993. When I finally did walk into a hallway of students it was very different and scary. Assignments, exams, and midterms weighed on the mind, yet the struggles paid off. I graduated from Concordia College on April 21 of 1994.

I never dreamed that the biggest accomplishment was yet to come. In the fall of 1994 I was accepted into the University of Alberta.

by Art Piche

Through the Rockies

My friend Dennis had never been to Vancouver, or the West Coast. Also, our Calgary Distribution Coordinator asked me if I would exchange some **Our Voice** papers for some Vancouver **Spare Change** papers, which I gladly did. I was also on a kind of fact-finding mission to maybe exchange ideas and to get information about how they are doing with the paper down there. One

continued...

Our Voice

WORDS on the street

thing, they're having a hard time keeping vendors, because it is easier to make more money from selling drugs, perhaps from panhandling, and even from welfare. Also, they have a set price for their paper.

For most of the time, Dennis and I spent time checking out the sights. I'm from out that way. Me and my family left back in '74, eighteen years ago. I have family and a few friends out there. My friend Dennis had never been out that way. So we grabbed the bus on a Thursday morning and went. We stayed a few days. I took Dennis all over by train, by ferry, by bus. He really

enjoyed it.

We stayed in a hotel outside of Vancouver. We shared a large room for \$25 each for three nights. I took Dennis to a couple of local pubs in New Westminster. We played it pretty cool, though.

They have a far better transit system in Vancouver than in Calgary, easier to get around! For the most it rained (until the last day). All in all, we had a good mini-vacation, except for the rain. Oh and we even took a few pictures.

P.S.: It's nice to take a break, but it's even better to come home!

By Rob Champion

SOCIAL INDICATORS The People numbers

Edmonton Food Bank study...

A recent study of users of Edmonton's Food Bank showed how poverty is getting starker in the Alberta capital. The study is a follow up on Alberta's welfare reforms that have seen 100,000 people leave the welfare rolls in the last three years. Not surprisingly, the demand on the food banks has risen sharply, by 122%. The study, a joint project of the Edmonton Food Bank and the Edmonton Social Planning Council, also showed:

- ☆ 1 in 20 Edmontonians used the food bank in 1996
- ☆ 40% of the recipients are children
- ☆ Average household income of food bank users: \$705 a month.
- ☆ One in five had NO source of income at all.
- ☆ 47% of parents skipped meals so their children could eat, 52% went at least one entire day without eating.
- ☆ 46% do not have a phone, 53% report "high" stress.
- ☆ Of people who had their welfare files closed in the last 3 years, 44% now have NO income.

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**Happy New Year
from the people
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The Asian Tiger in tights, the building manager and the toilet



A MEMOIR BY JOHN ZAPANTIS

As I woke up my eyes opened to greet the bedroom ceiling above me. The sound of the late night rowdy party still filtered noisily through the second floor of the apartment block. Off to the bathroom to ponder my frustration with the noise from the night before, I sat down and looked over to the tub where my eye caught something of significant beauty. There it was, a rare, trophy-size, Asian Tiger striped cockroach, about one inch in length, standing in the middle of my bathtub.

It looked up at me, like the tub was some kind of concert arena, and I the biggest fan of this tiny rock icon in sleazy tiger tights.

My defenses were temporarily stymied. The Asian Tiger is not your common silverfish type of cockroach. I was quite accustomed to watching them scurry across my bathroom linoleum like little white ghosts.

I looked over at my friend and the cockroach charged over to the drain and vanished.

This was it. I had to do something to get the apartment management to respond to my dire cockroach crisis. I was suddenly feeling this rebellious urge to develop into some kind of tenant dwelling moral terminator, enraged by all of the past events of my 19 months of suffering slumlord policy. I rushed down one flight of stairs so that I could fill out a formal complaint to have my place fumigated.

The next day there was a slip under my door letting me know that at nine the following morning I should vacate my suite for spraying. When I got home from

work later it was the usual bunch of party animals and they continued on until 3 am. Up nearly all night, I missed going to my job.

That evening it dawned on me that I had failed to meet with the building manager so they could go ahead with the annihilation of my mooching roommates. That night the music was louder than ever. I finally managed to fall asleep by about 6 in the morning, until I heard a banging on my door. There to greet me, with her furious-as-usual look, was our grumpy property manager. She hollered "Mister! We were here yesterday for spraying and you were still sleeping!"

Shaking away the cobwebs from the confusing night before, I fired back at her, "Hey, don't you yell at me like that, yell at your partying tenants who made me lose my sleep and lose the money I missed by not getting up on time for my job."

We were now face-to-face with one another. I told her I was fed up, and if nothing was done I'd have the media on her case about slumlording. She threatened me with an eviction notice the following month. I had five minutes to leave before they sprayed.

A month after all the spraying, I was once again amazed, while seated on my throne, to see in the middle of my bathtub a big black cockroach. Spraying couldn't stop these guys; they could survive a nuclear war! I remembered the Asian Tiger that had gotten away, but not this one. Grabbing a bunch of toilet paper I smothered him and flushed him. I realized then: only four months left in my six month lease. ♦

The Orphan

A STORY BY RICHARD BOS

Once there was an orphan. He lived on the street in an alley and in a box. He got beat up a lot. He stayed with his dad. But the boy was not worried any more because his dad found a bomb shelter for them. They were going in two weeks. The boy daydreamed about the place. He thought about the real food and the clean water and a nice bed. Maybe even some money. He always said it would be great.

It was almost time to go --only one day to go. In the morning, the boy went to wake up his dad but it was weird because he had never slept in before. But when he looked in his dad's box he found a note saying: By the time you read this, I will be dead. I want you to go on. It will take you all day to get there. It

might snow. It always does around this time of the year. Good-bye my son. I love you.

So, the boy left. He could see a bit of snow clouds. It looked like it was going to rain. Hours went by. It started to snow. Then it got harder and harder and then it started to hail. The hail was the size of golf balls. He ran down into the ditch. There was a piece of wood and a deep patch of grass. He covered himself and he fell asleep. In the morning he got up and started down the road again. Three hours later he reached the shelter. Right away the shelter brought him inside and started a big hot bath for him. They kept him clean and fed him. And every once in a while they gave him an allowance.



PHOTO: DOREEN L'ESPERANCE

About the author

BY MICHAEL WALTERS

Richard Bos is a writer. That's what he calls himself. He's modest and shy and barely says a word. "I just decided that I wanted to write stories. Not a lot to it I guess," Richards says.

The amazing thing is that he's just turning twelve.

Richard is a grade seven student who lives in Edmonton's inner city. With the free time he can find, he sits off away from others with his pen and paper. An **Our Voice** vendor knew Richard and his literary passion and suggested he submit some writing to the magazine.

Richard has a very vivid imagination, says his mother. "A simple idea will pop into his head and he can blow it completely out of proportion."

Richard hopes to keep writing as he grows older. He wants to gain healthy and interesting experiences from his new friends and life in the inner city.

Richard gets bored with television and comic books.

"I'm reading *David Copperfield* right now. I like it. It's good stuff. I'll only get better at writing if I read good writers."

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POETRY

One Green Tower

Sparrows perch on the slaughterhouse roof
watching the sway-back horses
that munch quietly, humbly with downcast eyes
pink and weary,
like they don't deserve their food.
The stench of burning flesh
mingles with the smokestack spew
and our half-mast flag waves its dingy goodbye.
But then there's one green tower.
It wrenches your gut to look at it in wide-eyed awe.
If you ignore the vandalism it has power.
If you ignore the dirt you can respect
the free-standing ladder leading up to its chamber.

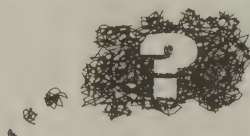
The tower can be your
friend.

If you grasp a yo-yo in
your pocket
then together you can
forget
there was ever
sway-back horses and
factory spew.

By Leanne Maree
Richer

*This poem won the "My
Dream is..." category of
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The Story Part 7

FICTION BY LAURIE McCULLOUGH

I went to Richmond, because I knew Cindy was there. She told me she must have been pregnant by her father. I heard her mother was going to take him back. I didn't want that. I didn't want a sixteen year old girl who looked like she was thirteen, but I didn't want Ted Franklin getting his hands on her. I got a ride, on the west side of Winnipeg, with a guy who hadn't slept since Toronto. I was standing close to the ring road. The ring road is a road which encircles Winnipeg. It follows the floodway which is the biggest excavation ever accomplished by mankind, bigger than the Panama Canal, and the reason the Peg hasn't had a flood since around 1950. This guy was driving a new Duster. Had an engine which could have nestled itself into the back end bottom of the Queen Mary, felt right at home. He said:

"If you can't drive, you're walking," and I said:

"I LOVE to drive!" so I could make that car go real fast, all the way to Abbotsford. Fast, it would gladly go. We got there, quick, after the guy in the back seat woke up to eat, a couple times. He slept for a long time. The air show was on, when we arrived. Over steak and eggs I got to see a MIG fighter hit the ground and kill the pilot.

Didn't spoil my appetite.

Wasn't real, not to me.

It didn't take long to get to Richmond. I ran into Cindy three weeks after I got there. I carved her name on a telephone pole, just the other side of Penticton. I told her about that, after she said:

"Laurie.....Laurie?" in the kind of voice drowning men must have when they find a long, buoyant timber. I had a place which was heated with wood. They could get away with that, on the coast. The caretaker was an old man who piled enough wood, out back, to build a pyramid. I had two, huge rooms on the top floor of an old house, just beyond the place where Granville used to curve, south of the Fraser Arms. I guess the bridge to Sea Island likely

passes over there, now.

I scooped Cindy right there. The night before, I ran into another draftdodger. The country was crawling with them in the early seventies. Ed Johannes. I had six feet of something which was woven and beautiful, if you sewed it to the seam of your pants. I got Ed to put it on the doorknob of the apartment her mother rented and Cindy lived in. She bought that six feet, to begin with. It was something they returned, before they let me walk down the only hall with no bars at this end.

Cindy knew. She came looking. I guess she cared for me, because she never went home. I bought her a train ticket after we spent a night in my attic suite. I have a thing for basements and attics. As she went down the stairs, the caretaker said:

"We don't usually have whores, around here." and I could see Cindy's shoulders slump under the bright, blue coat she wore. I stood on the landing, about a quarter way down, thought people shouldn't impose their ideals on innocent folks who cross their paths. Cindy slept with me, no sex. I was choked. The last thing I was interested in was impregnating a woman who named her child Laurie Elizabeth, after me and her mother. It was taken from loving, sweaty, desperately clinging arms. Truly loving arms, beneath eyes grief would have been proud to move in with.

Her baby was adopted, by strangers.

Cindy spoke of that, often. No matter where it came from, that was HER baby. I don't know a lot of things about giving birth, but I know I can't imagine Cindy's grief, her loss.

I wonder, often, what that baby's name turned out to be. The poor creature, being a direct genetic descendent of her father who was her mother's father, had the likelihood of every physical and psychological defect known to medical science.

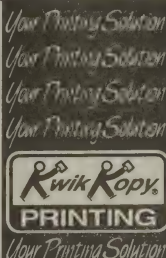
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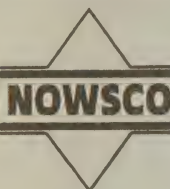
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**NEWS OF
THE WORLD****Pumpernickle tries to buy apricots**

THE adventurous spirit is as strong as ever. Witness British explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who has just announced plans to walk 1,800 miles across the frozen wastes of Antarctica. This, however, pales into insignificance alongside the exploits of German Werner Pumpernickle, 77, who spent three gruelling days attempting to buy a pound of apricots. Mr. Pumpernickle first got into difficulties when a short-cut to his local grocer left him stranded on a deserted building site. Eight hours later he was still stranded and decided to bed down for the

night inside a giant cement mixer. The following morning he finally moved on by wading across a canal, but then got lost in a maze of suburban gardens and spent his second night in a potting shed. Day three saw him scaling a 10 foot wall, fording a river and breaking into a house in search of food, where he was eventually discovered by the owners who alerted the police. "I'm an adventurer," admitted an exhausted Mr. Pumpernickle. "I once went for a haircut and was gone for a whole year."

Computer hard on bad chess player

It's all been going wrong with computer chess. In Milan, grandmaster Viktor Kitzka attacked a chess machine after it kept beating him. Equally traumatized was American chess fanatic Varsity Tickle, who almost killed himself on the instructions of his home-made chess computer Magnus. Trouble started when Mr. Tickle, 53, a bachelor from Seattle, sat down for a game with his state of the art electronic creation. "Everything went well until I tried to go to the toilet," explained Mr. Tickle. "At which point Magnus shouted, 'Sit down, loser, and

keep playing'. I didn't dare disobey." This was just the start, however, for over the next three hours the computer made him strip naked, slap himself repeatedly about the face, and strangle himself with a tie after casting at an inopportune moment. He was only able to escape after a fortuitous power cut, subsequently running into the street and screaming, "Magnus tried to kill me!" It later transpired that the computer had been re-programmed by a friend as a practical joke. "I was scared," admitted Mr. Tickle.

Gotta get that crowd going!

It's been a week of extreme weirdness in the entertainment world. In France, a nude production of Romeo and Juliet has attracted record audiences. "The balcony scene was a real eye-opener," opined one critic. Still more extreme were events in Italy, where a comedy club owner was fined for pumping laughing gas into the audience. Francis Mortello, 46, of Foggia, had resorted to gas because "frankly, you get more laughs in a morgue than you do in my place." All that changed, however, when he began releasing nitrous oxide

through the air conditioning system. "It was amazing," said one audience member. "I'd been coming for six years and hadn't even gotten close to laughing. And then all of a sudden I was falling off my chair." "Knock, knock" jokes were greeted with gales of mirth, and one about a chicken crossing the road practically caused a riot. Only when police raided the building and collapsed in hysterics while arresting a murder suspect did the truth emerge, whereupon Mr. Mortello was fined \$700.00. "It's certainly the funniest case I've ever dealt with," commented the judge.

Romanian town strikes blow for nose decency

It's been a bad week for noses. In America, researchers have suggested Neanderthal man died out because his enormous hooter made him particularly susceptible to colds. In Romania, meanwhile, a town council is fining people up to \$500.00 for blowing their noses in public. The fines are one of a series of measures introduced by councillors in Braila to improve the image of their town. "Blowing your nose not only looks and sounds

disgusting," said one councillor, "but can also lead to mass infection." So far over 50 people have been convicted, including a woman who accidentally sneezed on a policeman, and a man who was fined double for blowing his nose on a leaf in a local park. Other finable offences include spitting in a public place and coughing on public transport, although a scheme to flog people who break wind has been dropped.

Articles compiled by Paul Sussman in **The Big Issue**, London, England's street-sold magazine.**Our Voice**

BY TOM HIND.

At the age of 44 years, Victor Jones, who has been selling **Our Voice** for the last six months, appears pink and healthy, his face cherubic, a large smile most of the time jollying his face. Victor has lots of laugh wrinkles scored slightly around his twinkling eyes.

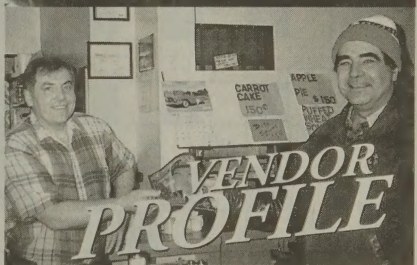
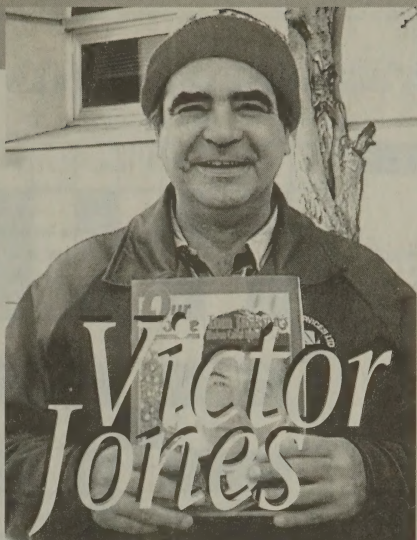
Victor says selling **Our Voice** supplements his \$625 monthly income from the rental of his half-section farm in Saskatchewan.

He was born at Macklin and grew up and spent most of his life in Saskatchewan.

Now Victor has been living in Edmonton for three years. "I really like it here," he smiles. "I love to meet people. After I pay rent on my apartment, my bills, there's not a lot left over for groceries and things. So selling the magazine really helps me with daily needs and unexpected expenses."

"My best friend, Balzar Spurlay, always told me to work hard and I'd always have money in my pocket," says Victor. "You know what, he was right. I used to help Spurlay farm his sections. After a hard day's work we'd head for the barn and drink rye. We'd stomp up a good old time, we would."

"One of the parts I like best about selling **Our Voice** is getting to meet different frowns and smiles on people's faces," continues Victor. "I like the different sayings people have, like, 'I'm broke'. Then the next person will come along and give me three or five dollars for a magazine. Yep. That's the part I like best. The element of surprise. It gets you every time," chuckles Victor.



Victor had a short life of crime when he was younger. He was set up by a lady he was sweet on. "She said she really needed the money," says Victor. "So I cashed four N.S.F. cheques at the Bay before they caught up with me. Got six months at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre. That really straightened me out," he adds with a laugh.

Apart from this one excursion into indiscretion, Victor has lived a pretty unblemished life. A real country boy,

besides farming Victor worked driving trucks for a few years, hauling gravel and asphalt.

Victor has no drug or alcohol problems, did not come from a dysfunctional family, and does not feel marginalized.

He has an abundant sense of humour, self-evident in the way he presents himself. Victor says that "you have to have good humour in this job. There's so many rude people out there, humour lets you accept them without getting upset. Keeps you level-headed. Not only that," he tacks on, "I find if you turn a smile on your face, you'll always turn one on someone else's face."

Victor is an uncomplicated man. "I like people to read my lips and know that what I am saying's the straight goods. They can believe what they're hearing. I've always been this way."

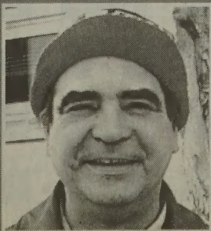
"It's good to help people with troubles in their life. There's a lot of poor people on the streets these days," he confides. "I was

always taught to be neighbourly and to help people in trouble, the way we did back on the farm. That's stayed with me to this day."

Asked if he could get one wish granted by a magic genie, what would it be? Victor replied, "I'd want a beautiful woman all to myself to love." He laughs.

Victor is single, up for grabs, has never been married yet. So his secret wish makes sense, eh?

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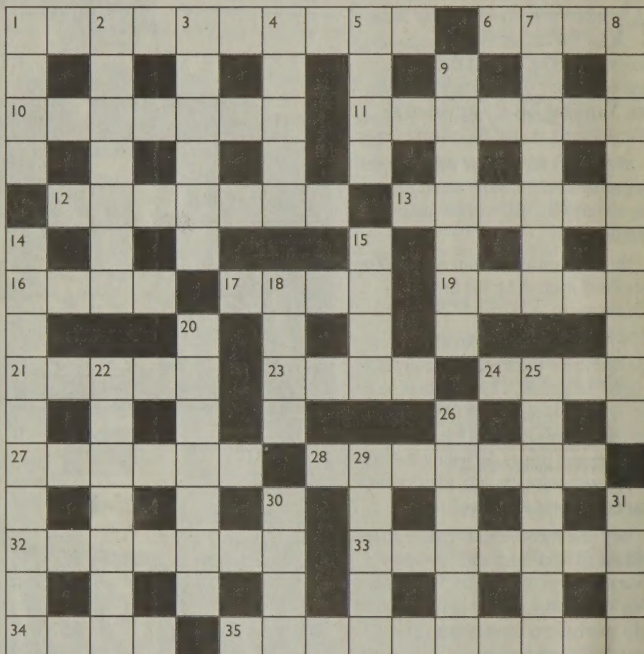
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A C R O S S

- 1 Breed of heavy horse (10)
 6 In the same place (4)
 10 Relating to the lens of the eye (7)
 11 Small trendy diners (7)
 12 'Dear Abby's' first name, in full (7)
 13 A structure set up in worship of an idol (6)
 16 Ages (4)
 17 A case of the ____ wagging the dog (4)
 19 Hairs growing in a circular pattern (5)
 21 'Superman' Christopher ____ (5)
 23 A dog's or cat's 'hands and feet' (4)
 24 To shock into immobility (4)
 27 Lots of white on a horse or shiny metal on a car (6)
 28 Singer Tracey ____ (7)
 32 Large Algerian port on the Mediterranean (7)
 33 Small thorn or tingling sensation (7)
 34 The part of a stem from which a leaf grows (4)
 35 Kittenish structure involving hands and string (4,6)

D O W N

- 1 Black-and-white Chanel (4)
 2 Nigerian language (7)
 3 Having vigour or vitality (6)
 4 India's capital: New ____ (5)
 5 Part of an ear from which earrings hang (4)
 7 Wheat-flour tortilla wrapped around a filling (7)
 8 Fantasy world - not the one in Orlando (6,4)
 9 Spurns (7)
 14 Small Irish elf with a pot of gold (10)
 15 What I Across usually pulls (4)
 18 Snakes which Cleopatra killed herself with (4)
 20 More seedy, run-down (7)
 22 Angered (7)
 25 Offered an expression of gratitude (7)
 26 More lively (6)
 29 Promotes heavily, hard-sells (5)
 30 Large continent (4)
 31 Simple, insignificant (4)



Puzzle #45
 answers will be
 published in
 the FEBRUARY
 issue of
Our Voice.

Answers to DECEMBER 1 Crossword #44

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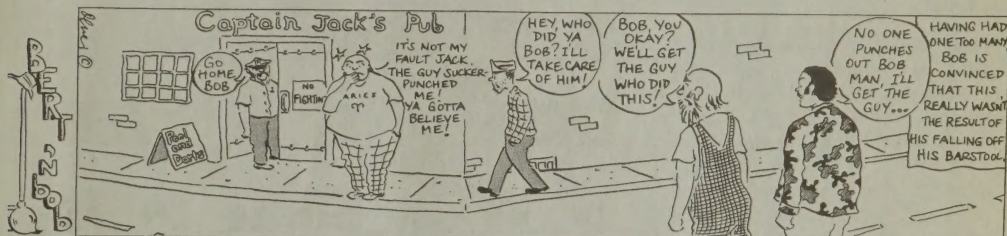
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AFTER X-MAS



Where's the story?

Stuart McLean's writing celebrates the ordinary

BY BARB LAUBER

Stuart McLean celebrates the ordinary, the unsung, the taken-for-granted. His journalistic beat is "the corners." He writes, he says, about the "importance of the unimportant." He writes about yo-yos, snow shovelling, and jersey cows.

Stuart used to cover politicians, wars, and disasters. But he got tired of it. "When you begin as a journalist, you go to these big stories. They ask you to interview celebrities. After you do that for ten years, it's not a challenge anymore. I guess I tried to make it harder for myself, by going where there wasn't obviously a story. It was more fun. It was delightful. And no one else was there. I hate being part of the pack. I hate the story being defined for you, where it's dictated to you. It offended my sense of uniqueness. Here it's more creative. I have to go out and find it."

Quirky, funny, touching—those are the hallmarks of a Stuart McLean story. Stuart finds drama in everyday objects and dignity in the activities of unimportant people. He doesn't worry about whether others will share his sense of wonder. "I trust that if it's important to me it will be for someone else too."

For five years, Stuart found a home for his kind of journalism on Morningside, the CBC Radio program hosted by Peter Gzowski. In his Monday-morning spot he exposed "The Shocking Truth About Household Dust." He chronicled the hotdog vendor wars and learned how they get the lead inside pencils.

The subject is different, but the sensibility is the same in Stuart's book of travel writing, *Welcome Home: Travels in Smalltown Canada*. "I like small places, sort of the way I like ordinary people," he explains. "The same challenge was there. Where's the story, Stuart? There was no obvious story. Until of course you start talking to people. Then it was a rich, rich vein



that no one else had mined."

Stories from the Vinyl Cafe, Stuart's most recent book, is a collection of short stories about the foibles of family life. As a fiction writer, Stuart walks a fine line between heartwarming and cloying. Still, it's impossible not to laugh at the predicaments he creates for his characters.

Street papers are a valuable opportunity for the poor, Stuart believes. "There's a whole different dignity in selling a product. It becomes a commercial transaction. It's a humiliating experience to ask people for spare change. It's not a humiliating experience to sell something. It's a life-affirming experience. It's probably hugely therapeutic."

Stuart has great confidence in Canadians. "We live in a wonderful society, with lots of safety nets in it. We live in a caring society. It's the instinct of this society to help people. I'm pleased to live in that kind of society." He admits that people often spout anti-poor beliefs. "They think there are welfare cheaters. They've been sold that story. But if you confront them with a real person, a real story, the impulse is there to give. Life isn't cheap in Canada. There are places in the world where life is cheap." ♦

CONTEST Win your own copy of Stuart McLean's *STORIES FROM THE VINYL CAFE*

Our Voice also looks for the story that hasn't been told. **Our Voice** is sponsoring a **Stuart McLean Story Contest**. We are looking for articles on any topic or fiction written in the spirit of Stuart McLean. Perhaps a piece on what motivates men who wear elaborate moustaches. Perhaps a

tale of feuding family pets. Winning entries will be published in **Our Voice** and winners will receive a copy of Stuart's book. Stuart McLean himself will select the winner. Suggested length: 750 words for nonfiction pieces, up to 2000 words for fiction. Deadline: March 1, 1997.



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